

CLAIMS

1. An object tracking system comprising:
 - a trackable unit including
 - 5 a memory storing data uniquely identifying said trackable unit, and
 - an interface member coupled to said memory;
 - a controller;
 - a connector releasably holding said trackable unit, wherein said
 - 10 connector defines a communication path between said memory of said trackable unit and said controller when said trackable unit is held by said connector; and
 - means associated with said controller for determining a state of said trackable unit which is selected from a group of states including (i) said trackable unit is present within said
 - 15 connector and (ii) said trackable unit is absent from said connector.
2. The object tracking system of Claim 1, wherein said state of said trackable unit is determinable by said controller at any time.
3. The object tracking system of Claim 2, wherein said data uniquely identifying said trackable unit is readable by said controller at any time said trackable unit is held by said connector.
4. The object tracking system of Claim 1, wherein said state of said trackable unit is determinable by said controller while said connector is stationary relative to any nearby structures.
5. The object tracking system of Claim 1 wherein,

said object tracking system further includes a plurality of
connectors, said connector being one connector of said
plurality of connectors, and
said means for determining includes means for determining said
5 state of said trackable unit relative to any connector of said
plurality of connectors.

6. The object tracking system of Claim 1 wherein,
said object tracking system further includes a plurality of trackable
10 units, said trackable units being a trackable unit of said
plurality of trackable units, and
said means for determining includes means for determining said
state of a trackable unit of said plurality of trackable units
relative to said connector.

15 7. The object tracking system of Claim 1 wherein,
said object tracking system further includes a plurality of
connectors, said connector being a connector of said
plurality of connectors,
20 each said connector of said plurality of connectors has a location
associated therewith, and
said object tracking system further includes means for associating
said trackable unit with said location of a connector of said
plurality of connectors when said trackable unit is present
25 within said connector of said plurality of connectors.

8. An apparatus for tracking an object, said apparatus comprising:
an electronic device having a memory, said memory storing data
uniquely identifying said electronic device; and

an interface member coupled to said electronic device and coupled to an object;

whereby the object, by virtue of its being coupled to the electronic device, is associated with and tracked by the data uniquely identifying the electronic device.

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9. The apparatus of Claim 8 wherein,

said apparatus further includes

a connector having a pair of opposed contacts which

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define a gap therebetween, and

a controller in communication with said connector,

and

said electronic device is receivable by said connector within said gap.

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10. The apparatus of Claim 9, wherein said data of said electronic device is readable by said controller.

11. The apparatus of Claim 9 wherein,

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said apparatus further includes a plurality of connectors in communication with said controller, said connector being one connector of said plurality of connectors, and each connector of said plurality of connectors is electrically selectable independent of other connectors of said plurality of connectors.

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12. An apparatus for detecting the presence or absence of an object, said apparatus comprising:

a controller having a data communication interface;

a plurality of connectors in communication with a connector data communication interface;
a data communication link between said data communication interface of said controller and said connector data communication interface; and
5 an object coupled to a device having a data communication contact and storing data uniquely identifying said object, said device being receivable by a connector of said plurality of connectors, said data communication contact being in communication with said connector when said device is received by said connector;
10 whereby the plurality of connectors is in data communication with the controller; and
whereby the controller receives the data uniquely identifying the object when the device is received by the connector, thereby indicating the presence of the object.

13. The apparatus of Claim 12 wherein,
said data communication link includes a plurality of parallel communication paths, and
20 data communicated through said data communication link has a serial format.

14. The apparatus of Claim 13 wherein,
25 said data communication interface of said controller is a parallel data communication interface, and
said connector data communication interface is a parallel data communication interface.

30 15. The apparatus of Claim 12 wherein,

said plurality of connectors is a first plurality of connectors and said connector data communication interface is a first connector data communication interface,
said apparatus further includes

- 5 a second plurality of connectors in communication
 with a second connector data communication
 interface, and
 a second data communication link between said first
 connector data communication interface and
10 said second connector data communication
 interface,

 said device is receivable by a connector of said second plurality of
 connectors, said data communication contact being in
 communication with said connector when said device is
15 received by said connector, and
 data communicated through said first data communication link is
 communicated through said second data communication
 link.

20 16. The apparatus of Claim 15, wherein each connector of said first plurality of
 connectors is selectable for communication independent of each other
 connector of said first plurality of connectors and independent of each
 connector of said second plurality of connectors.

25 17. The apparatus of Claim 15, wherein each connector of said first plurality of
 connectors is selectable by said controller through communication of data
 from said controller through said first data communication link.

18. The apparatus of Claim 15, wherein each connector of said second plurality of connectors is selectable by said controller through communication of data from said controller through said first data communication link.
- 5 19. A method of tracking objects, the method comprising the steps of:
detecting activities performed with respect to an object which is
associated with an electronic device having a unique
identification code; and
logging at a controller activities performed with respect to the
10 object.
20. The method of Claim 19, wherein the step of detecting includes a step of detecting the presence of the object in an object retaining structure at any time.
- 15 21. The method of Claim 19, wherein the step of detecting includes a step of detecting the presence of the object in an object retaining structure while the object is stationary relative to the object retaining structure and other structures associated with the object retaining structure.
- 20 22. The method of Claim 20, wherein the step of detecting includes a step of scanning a plurality of connectors of an object retaining structure for the identification code of the electronic device associated with the object.
- 25 23. The method of Claim 22, wherein the step of scanning includes a step of receiving at a controller the identification code from the electronic device.
24. The method of Claim 19, wherein the method further includes a step of identifying an individual who performs an activity related to an object.

25. The method of Claim 19, wherein the method further includes a step of identifying an object which has been absent from an object retaining structure for an excessive amount of time.